

FIRST SOVIET EXPERIMENT

tegrity both in Moscow and before the League of Nations but to no avail. Moscow replied and persistently maintained that the occupation of Gilan was only a security measure undertaken by the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan on whose actions the government of Soviet Russia had no influence.⁷ This claim was alleged at the time when preparations were being made for the convocation of the First Congress of the Peoples of the East in the freshly sovietized Baku.

Moscow's policy of pretending that the conquered border regions had not lost their independence but on the contrary had gained it after their capture by the Red Army was especially evident in the case of Azerbaijan. The Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan entered into separate diplomatic relations with Estonia, Afghanistan, Turkey, and Iran. On May 30, 1921, the Teheran government issued a note granting diplomatic recognition to Azerbaijan. This was followed by the dispatch of an Iranian mission to Baku to negotiate the establishment of diplomatic and commercial relations between the two countries. As a result, one Behbud Chakhahtinski was appointed Minister of Azerbaijan in Teheran.⁸ The whole story was the application in practice of the Communist theory about the "highest form of Soviet autonomy" so that Soviet Azerbaijan might display its perfect right to enter into "contractual relations" with other countries. The fact that Soviet Azerbaijan possessed a diplomatic representative in Iran, a country that has a province also called Azerbaijan, was not without its ominous significance.

For the time being, however, the Iranians were more worried about the immediate issues in Gilan, where the Soviet occupation was

taking a new turn. As soon as the Soviet troops disembarked at Enzeli, they established contact with the Iranian chieftain Kuchik Khan, who since 1917 had been in a state of open rebellion against the central government of Iran and whose control of the forest-rich province of Gilan had initially caused some trouble to the "Dunsterforce" in 1918. The British throughout 1919 had managed to maintain a state of armed neutrality between their own troops and the bands of Kuchik Khan and had thus avoided an open breach, which would have complicated their operations in Iran's Caspian provinces.

⁷ *Ibid.*

sCastagné, *op. cit.* pp. 11 ff.